

ARCHIVAL THEORY IN PRACTICE

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The formation of an archival collection is one of the basic tasks in the functioning of a state archives in Poland. Its aim is to preserve for posterity any documents of historical importance associated with the activities of the authors.

Modern methods archival collection comprise document selection and monitoring of public institutions within the scope of document management. On principle, the documents remain in those institutions (in their offices or archives) for 25 years and then are transferred to the historical archives. Archives pay most attention to document selection, which is a decisive factor in the formation of a collection.

Descriptors (ATLANTI)

Storage: other (3.1.9); office accommodation: other (3.2.9); standards (9)

Polish archival law

The Law on National Archival Collection and Archives¹, in force in Poland since 1983, introduced the notion of national archival collection. According to this Law any acts and documents, regardless of the way or medium of their creation, which are relevant sources of information of historical importance about the functioning of Polish State and its citizens are considered archival materials constituting the national archival collection. Supervision of the national archival collection is exercised by the Minister of Culture through the Head Director of the State Archives.

National Archival Collection is divided into state and non-state archival collections.

The state archival collection consists of archival materials created as a result of the functioning of:

- state and local government organs and institutions

and also

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¹ Law of 14 July 1983 on national archival collection and archives, Journal of Law nr. 171 from 2002, item 1396.

- political parties; political, social, occupational, economic and other non-state organisations; churches and denominational organisations; political, social and economic activists, scholars, artists and other persons who have contributed to the development of political, cultural or economic life; families of historical importance for the state and its political, economic and social relationships (also concerning their estate properties, factories etc.)

if those materials became the state property through purchase, donation or in other way.

Non-state archival collection consists of archival materials which are not the property of the state and which were created as a result of the functioning of:

- political parties; political, co-operative and other social organisations; churches and denominational organisations; and other non-state organisations

which are their property,

- private individuals

which are the property of those individuals or their heirs.

Co-ordination of the archival activities on the territory of the state lies within the range of the activities of the Head Director of the State Archives. Archival activity regarding the state archival collection is conducted by:

- the state archival network consisting of:
 1. state archives
 2. separated state archives (the archives of: the Parliament *Sejm*; Senate; Presidential Office; the archives subordinate to the Minister of National Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs and Administration; organisational cells dealing with tax revenue intelligence; Home Security Agency; Intelligence Agency; National Memory Institute – Commission for Prosecution of Crimes Against Polish Nation)
 3. archives of state and local government organs and institutions
 - institutions entrusted with a given archival collection (due to their special character, the head Director of the State Archives may entrust them with collecting and keeping archival materials)
 - state libraries and museums which collect and keep archival materials included in the state archival collection

Archival activity consists in collecting, recording, keeping, describing, preservation and providing access to archival materials as well as information about them.

Archival theory

Manuals on archival theory and methodology for Polish students of history with archival specialisation define the scope of this scientific field and the function of archives as collecting, keeping, describing and providing access to archival materials. We can also read that the duty to collect archival materials is followed by another one – the formation of an archival collection. It is done through supervising of the expanding archival collection (documentation remaining with its creators before its transmission to the historical archives) as well as by the document selection based on its value.

The formation of an archival collection is an important task of the state archives in Poland. Its aim is to fully preserve any documents of historical importance associated with the activities of the authors. It is done through the supervision of the expanding archival collection and selection, which has a primary importance for the formation of archival collection. We have to conduct selection due to a lack of space for preservation of all documentation produced as well as the repetitiveness of some documents and information. The aim of the selection is to segregate that material which needs be preserved perpetually from other documents².

Archival practice

To enable the proper supervision of the state archives over the expanding archival collection, from among offices, institutions and companies the most important and representative ones are singled out first. Their documentation, after a selection, is transferred to the state archives, becoming a part of the historical collection. The principles of selection of the supervised units are established by the Head Director of the State Archives and the choice of a given institution is made by the director of a proper local state archive.

The supervision provided by the state archives over the archives of given institutions includes:

- conducting archival controls
- advising on office and archival regulations
- providing expert opinions regarding the documents and giving consent for the destruction of the non-archival ones, whose preservation time, according to the existing regulations, has expired and which have been found invalid for the practical purposes of a given institution.
- conducting training sessions for archivists and office workers
- supervising proper preparation and transfer of selected materials to the state archive

Institutions included in the archival supervision system and creating archival materials are obliged to collect, list, keep and protect their files in their own archives, the so-called institutional archives. They are also obliged to classify (namely to use a

² H.Robótka, B.Ryszewski, A.Tomczak, *Archiwistyka*, Warszawa 1989; *Metodyka pracy archiwalnej*, ed. S.Nawrocki. S. Sierpowski, Poznań 1995.

subject division of files), qualify (to assign appropriate archival categories to given files, that is to define the period of their preservation) and eliminate (to decide about the destruction of that part of the non-archival documentation whose preservation period – according to the existing regulations – has expired and which has been found invalid for the practical purposes of a given institution) documentation. They are also obliged to hand over the archival materials to the appropriate state archive after the period defined in the binding regulations, that is after 25 years of their creation.

Individual archival categories are given the following symbols³:

- symbol “A” – the archival category of the documentation consisting of archival materials, that is the part of the documentation intended for perpetual preservation due to its historical value
 - symbol “B” – the archival category of the non-archival documentation, that is the part of the documentation which has only temporary practical value for its author and which does not constitute archival material:
1. symbol “B” with the additional Arabic numbers (B2, B3, B5, B10, B20, B25, B50) designates the archival category of the documentation with the temporary period of preservation, which is destroyed after this period of time. The period of preservation, designated by Arabic numbers, is counted in full calendar years from 1 January of the year following the final closing of a given case (e.g. the files designated by the symbol B5 and concerning the cases closed in 1999, should be kept until 1 January 2005). The preservation period for a given type of files is decided on the basis of a uniform subject index of documentation, which is a list of entries expressing the subject classification of the documentation regardless of the organisational structure of the institution creating files and which contains the archival qualification of files. After the determined period of preservation of files and when they are regarded no longer valid by a given institution, they can be destroyed after a consent was given by an appropriate state archive
 2. symbol BE with the additional Arabic numbers (BE5, BE10, BE50, etc.) designates the archival category of the documentation which, after a given period of its preservation requires expert advising due to its character, content and the importance of files (the period of preservation is counted as in point 1). Expert advising is conducted at the request of a given institution by an appropriate state archive which may change the qualification of the archival documentation.
 3. symbol Bc designates the archival category of files with short-term practical importance. Those files can be destroyed after they have been fully used. Such a decision is taken by the organisational unit which created the files, without their transmission to its institutional archive, but in the co-operation with that archive.

Each state and local government institution which has been defined as creating archival materials is obliged to create and use its own uniform subject index of files, office instruction (that is the collection of regulations concerning the document circu-

³ To the description of individual categories I use the materials prepared by Ewa Perlakowska, the head of the Department of Supervision over the expanding archival collection of the State Archive in Cracow, for the informational purposes.

lation in a given institution and the way of dealing with those documents and files) as well as archival instruction (that is, the collection of regulations defining the organisation, aims and the scope of activities of its own archive as well as handing over the files from individual branches of a given institution to the archive; the way of their listing, preservation, protection and providing access to them in the institutional archive; the principles and way of handing over the archival materials to the state archives; the principles of deciding about the destruction of the documentation).

An archival instruction should settle the following matters connected with the functioning of an institutional archive:

1. organisation and the scope of the archive's activities
2. staff
3. rooms and equipment
4. handing the files from individual branches to the archive
5. listing
6. keeping and protection of files
7. access to the files
8. destruction of the files
9. handing of the files over to the archive
10. control of the archive
11. dealing with files in the case of reorganisation or liquidation of a given institution or its branch

Archival practice – an example of the State Archive in Cracow⁴

On 31st December 2004 the list of institutions supervised by the State Archive in Cracow included 699 units: 387 state and 312 local government ones. On principle, the State Archive in Cracow supervises institutions from Małopolskie voievodship, but there are minor exceptions to this rule resulting from the lack of territorial adjustment of individual state archives to the current administrative division of the country.

In 2004 employees of the State Archive in Cracow conducted 192 archival inspections. The most numerous group of the controlled institutions were registry offices, local government units and those institutions which came under the Archive's supervision in 2002. In addition, 18 surveys were conducted mainly in the community archives, which was connected with the registry offices' inspections. The inspections conducted by the State Archive result in official recommendations issued by the Archive Director. Increase in legal awareness of the employees of the controlled institutions and the fact that they can obtain help and information from the Archive's employees result in more and more reliable implementation of the above mentioned Director's recommendations in individual institutions. Institutions have the greatest difficulty, especially since the establishment of higher standards by the state archival service, with the proper arrangement and recording of the files. It is caused, among others, by the fact that archivist's duties are often performed by people without proper training in this field, who have been employed in the institution for a short time, for whom being an archivist is an additional task or even assigning the archivist's duties to the employees who proved incompetent in other tasks or are just be-

⁴ All figures and information concerning the archival supervision provided by the State Archive in Cracow refer to 2004. They are quoted from the Report on the activities of the State Archive in Cracow in 2004.

fore their retirement. In 2004 the archive employees trained 710 persons on one or two-day archival training sessions. In this way they tried to help the employees in the controlled institutions in the proper implementation of archival regulations, which often causes difficulties as well.

In 2004 the employees of the Supervision Department of the Cracow Archive issued opinions concerning the proper preparation of 88 office and archival regulations (office instructions, file lists, archival instructions). They also assessed 160 changes and appendices in already existing regulations. Currently under scrutiny we have 284 office and archival regulations, which were sent to the Archive in the years 2002-2004. It results from the fact that the majority of the office and archival regulations sent for our analysis require major interference on the part of the Archive employees. A good solution is to create model regulations by the Archive employees for various kinds of institutions. Then those regulations can be accepted by a given institution as they are, or constitute a basis for creating its own inner regulations⁵.

In 2004 the state institutions remaining under the archival supervision submitted 856 applications for consent to destroy non-archival documentation of the overall length of 28,687.17 running metres. In addition, the Archive assessed 36 applications for the destruction of 885 running metres of non-archival documentation from institutions not run by the state.

Almost every third of applications for consent for non- archival documentation destruction submitted to the Archive required additional explanations and supplements. In 100 cases it was necessary to carry out archival expert appraisals. Looking on the spot, in a given institution's archive, through the files singled out for destruction, it was assessed if the decision to destroy them was correct. After the scrutiny of about 2 000 running metres of files, 5% of them were qualified as archival materials which should not be destroyed. The errors which most often appear in applications for consent for non-archival documentation destruction are the following: imprecise description of the content of individual files with the documentation intended for destruction, not quoting appropriate legal regulations which were the basis for making the decision about file destruction, not giving the quantity of the documentation intended for destruction, inappropriate filling in of the file destruction report forms, the use of outdated forms. It follows from the experience of the Archive employees that among the persons managing individual institutions' archives there is a considerable interest in consultations concerning the process of classification of the documentation as well as the appropriate construction of applications for consent for non-archival documentation destruction.

Interest in the consultations concerning not only the above mentioned matters, but also other issues connected with the managing of the institution's archive made the State Archive in Cracow take the decision to organise a series of training sessions concerning the office and archival issues. These are one or two-day training sessions for a given groups of people, e.g. the employees of educational centres, heads of registry offices, workers of county job centres, as well as a two-level course including all office and archival issues necessary for the appropriate functioning of an institu-

⁵ Office and archival regulations were prepared for the following institutions: social care centres, schools, offices, job centres, appeal prosecutor's offices, district prosecutor's offices, provincial administrative court. The most often created model regulations are uniform inventories of files.

tion's archive (48 hours of theoretical classes and 60 hours of practical ones)⁶. It may clearly be seen that such activity of the Archive contributes to a better understanding of the archival issues by employees of various institutions. They learn the principles of analysis, recording and destruction of the documentation. This in turn facilitates work of the staff members of the State Archive in Cracow who are responsible for contact and supervision of the institutions which keep their individual archives.

In 2004 at the State Archive in Cracow the duties connected with the supervision of the expanding archival collection were carried out by 4 full time employees of the Supervision Department. However, the actual work of archival supervision was also done by 13 other staff members of the Archive as their additional occupation. (Overall time they devoted to those tasks within one year would be equivalent to two full time jobs). Among them there are both people employed in the branches out of Cracow performing the supervising duties within the scope similar to the scope of duties of the staff of the Supervision Department⁷ as well as the employees of other archival departments in Cracow, who were asked to make appraisals of the applications for consent for non-archival documentation destruction (especially the technical and cartographic one) as well as to participate in creating expert opinions of the archival and non-archival documentation.

According to the estimates done at the end of 2004 the State Archive in Cracow should have taken over into its collection about 8,280 running metres of the documentation of closed or privatised institutions. Due to not always proper arrangement, recording and classification into a given category of the files kept in some institutional archives, those estimates are only approximate. The materials the Archive should have taken over, are currently kept in private, state or local government institutions, but were created exclusively by state institutions.

In 2004 the State Archive in Cracow took over into its collection about 224 running metres of the documentation from the closed down or privatised institutions⁸. Improper arrangement, recording and classification of a part of the documentation which the State Archive in Cracow should have taken over is the reason why such a large part of the documentation still remains outside the Archive's collection. Until recently another important reason was a complete lack of space in the Archive's storerooms. In 2001 a Renaissance castle, situated about 40 km. Outside Cracow, was finally prepared for the purpose of documentation storage. The present space reserve for keeping the files (altogether in all buildings used by the State Archive in Cracow) is 7,261 running metres. In the coming years it is planned to take over 400-500 running metres of files per year. A constant pressure on the supervised and pri-

⁶ Theoretical classes are the lectures conducted by the employees of the State Archive in Cracow and devoted to the main archival notions such as archival law, the organisation of the archives in Poland, registry, managing of the documentation in an institution and its archive, institution archive's rooms and staff, organisation and duties of an institution's archive. Practical classes involve a complete working out of a chosen files collection under the supervision of an employee of the State Archive in Cracow. All classes take place in the Archive's building. Once a week a whole day is devoted to the training to enable the participants to conduct their usual professional activities simultaneously.

⁷ The State Archive in Cracow has four branches outside the city: in Bochnia, Tarnów, Nowy Sącz and Nowy Targ. All basic staff members of those branches, apart from their duties to analyse and record the files kept in them, also perform the tasks connected with archival supervision within the territorial scope of their archives. All activities connected with archival supervision are coordinated by the Supervision Department in Cracow.

⁸ On 31 December 2004 there were 19,034 running metres of files kept in the State Archive in Cracow.

vatised institutions to hand over to the Archive properly prepared archival materials is to help achieve this.

Summary

The Law on National Archival Collection and Archives, in force in Poland since 1983, introduced the notion of national archival collection. According to this Law any acts and documents, regardless of the way or medium of their creation, which are relevant sources of information of historical importance about the functioning of Polish State and its citizens are considered archival materials constituting the national archival collection. Supervision of the national archival collection is exercised by the Minister of Culture through the Head Director of the State archives.

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